



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

BILL NELSON
FLORIDA

September 24, 2004

The President
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Last week, I sent a letter to Under Secretary Mike Brown seeking his immediate response to an urgent problem in Florida: FEMA's refusal to assist with debris removal from private property in communities throughout Florida. To date, I have not received a response. As you know, you have already designated most of Florida in need of Category A public assistance for debris removal. I urge you to cut through the bureaucratic red-tape our communities in Florida are experiencing and issue a state-wide affirmation of the public need for debris removal.

Every area of Florida hit by the hurricanes has called or written my office seeking help with debris removal. According to my constituents, FEMA will not assist with the removal of debris because the debris is on private property. As you know, Section 206.224 of the Code of Federal Regulations states that FEMA may provide assistance to remove debris from privately owned lands and waters when it is in the public interest. Removal of debris is in the public interest when it will eliminate a threat to public health and safety, eliminate the threat of significant damage to improved public or private property or will ensure the economic recovery of the affected community. The accumulation of this debris stymies our communities' efforts to recover and poses a safety and health threat to our residents. Other states like Louisiana and Oklahoma have received this type of public assistance from FEMA in response to disasters that have hit their communities. Clearly, it is in the public interest for FEMA to assist Florida's resource-strapped communities with debris removal on private property too.

I look forward to your immediate response. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson